

1176

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

JUL - 5 1988

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Nora Free Christian Church

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number County Highway 257

N/A not for publication

city, town Linden Township X vicinity of Hanska, Minnesota

state Minnesota

code 22 (MN)

county Brown

code 015

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Nora Free Christian Church

street & number N/A

city, town Hanska

N/A vicinity of

state Minnesota 56041

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Brown County Courthouse

street & number N/A

city, town New Ulm

state Minnesota 56073

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Minnesota Statewide Historic Sites Survey

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1978

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office, Fort Snelling History Center

city, town St. Paul

state Minnesota 55111

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Nora Free Christian Church is located on a hilly, wooded site in Brown County's Linden Township about 1/2 mile east of the small community of Hanska, Minnesota. The site consists of a church, parsonage, gazebo, log building, garage, and cemetery comprising two contributing buildings, two non-contributing buildings, one contributing structure, and one contributing site.

Church. Contributing. The Nora Free Christian Church is a simple woodframe, Gothic Revival building which was started in the spring of 1883, demolished by a tornado before its completion in July of 1883, rebuilt that fall, and completed in the spring of 1884. The building has a gabled roof, four bay sidewalls with pointed arched windows, clapboard siding, and a square belfry with pointed arched vents and a polygonal spire topped by a metal finial. The entrance consists of double doors beneath a pointed arched transom, set within a gabled roof enclosed entrance porch. The church is in good condition and has been altered with an asphalt shingle roof, a small rear addition, and a northern fellowship hall addition which was constructed in two stages at undetermined dates.

Parsonage. Contributing. The Nora parsonage is a two story Queen Anne style woodframe house which was built in 1906. The parsonage has a complex gambrel roofline, a polygonal two story tower at the northeast corner, and open porches supported by simple columns on the north and east facades. It has clapboard siding, decorative fishscale shingle detailing, and rectangular 1/1 sash. The parsonage is in good condition and has been altered with an asphalt shingle roof, screens installed in the eastern porch, and an enclosed entrance addition on the south facade.

Gazebo. Contributing. The gazebo is a small, circa 1930 structure located northwest of the parsonage. The octagonal woodframe building has a polygonal cap covered with asphalt shingles, a poured concrete floor, and low walls sheathed in vertical wood siding. It is in good condition.

Log Building. Non-contributing. Southeast of the church is a small log building which was constructed circa 1940 as the Jorgensen Museum, a small museum dedicated to pioneers who founded the church. The museum was constructed with logs taken from the pioneer home of Ole Jorgensen, a charter member of the church. The log building has dovetail joints, a stone foundation, a gabled roof, and multi-paned casement windows. It is in good condition.

Garage. Non-contributing. South of the parsonage is a small circa 1940 garage with shiplap siding, a wide gambrel roof, and a modern garage door. It is in good condition.

Cemetery. Contributing. The church cemetery is located on a hill west of the church and contains two circa 1920 brick piers flanking its entrance and a large collection of graves and headstones dating from 1883 to the present.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1883-1931 Builder/Architect Unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Nora Free Christian Church, built in 1883 near Hanska in Brown County, is historically significant for its close associations with Kristofer Janson and Amandus E. Norman and as the home of a rare, liberal Unitarian congregation established within Minnesota's conservative, Lutheran dominated Norwegian immigrant culture. Janson was a Norwegian writer, intellectual, and Unitarian minister who made a substantial impact on the religious, political, and cultural lives of Norwegian immigrants in Minnesota between 1879 and 1893. Dr. Amandus E. Norman was Janson's protege and successor and a nationally known Unitarian minister in his own right.

Kristofer Janson was born in Bergen in 1841, the son of a prominent Norwegian family. He studied Lutheran theology at the University at Kristiania and in the 1860's and 1870's became a popular poet and writer who was a contemporary and friend of Henrik Ibsen and Bjornstjerne Bjornson. In 1876 Janson was one of four Norwegian poets to receive the country's first state sponsored poets' stipend. He supported the Norwegian nationalist movement and aroused controversy by publishing his stories in "landsmaal", the common peasant dialect spurned by Norway's wealthy and educated classes. During this period Janson became increasingly dissatisfied with the rigid doctrines and hierarchical structure of traditional Norwegian Lutheranism and began to promote more liberal theological ideas.

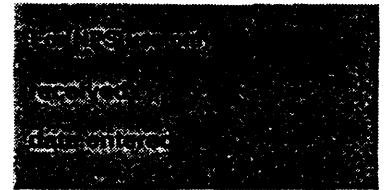
In 1879-1880 Janson came to the Midwest for an extended lecture tour at the invitation of leading Norwegian writer and intellectual Rasmus B. Anderson of the University of Wisconsin. During the six month tour he spoke in crowded halls in major Midwestern cities including Minneapolis, and in smaller Minnesota towns including Madelia, Willmar, Benson, Fargo, and Albert Lea. His tour was closely followed by the nation's Norwegian press and he became popular among Minnesota's large immigrant population, despite warnings from many of the state's conservative Norwegian Lutheran pastors that his ideas were dangerously heretical.

In 1881 Janson negotiated with the American Unitarian Church to become a missionary for Unitarianism among Norwegians in the Midwest. He sailed to the U. S. in October of 1881, was ordained a Unitarian minister in Chicago the next month, and moved to Minneapolis in December. When Janson arrived in Minneapolis, the city was brimming with the nation's largest concentration of Norwegian immigrants. Most were religiously and socially conservative, relying on strict Lutheran tenets for intellectual and social guidance, and received Janson's ideas with caution and often scorn. Janson began a series of lectures and meetings on Unitarianism and religious issues which aroused controversy among the Norwegian clergy and laity and which were reported and both praised and debunked in the Norwegian press. In January of 1882 he organized the Free Christian Church of Minneapolis (known as Nazereth Church beginning in 1885) which became the Twin Cities' third Unitarian congregation. Later that month he became the minister of Nora Free Christian Church in Brown County's Linden Township, the site of one of southern Minnesota's densest concentrations of

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Nora Free

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Norwegian immigrant farmers. Several years later Janson established Unitarian churches in St. Paul, Underwood, and Fergus Falls, Minnesota, and Hudson, Wisconsin (although he was official minister only to the Minneapolis, Brown County, and Hudson groups) and inspired the further spread of Unitarianism in the state.

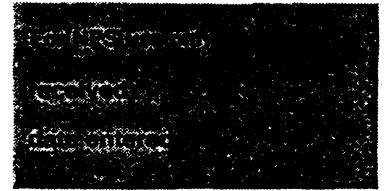
In addition to their missionary activities, Janson and his wife Drude Krog Janson became leading intellectuals within Minnesota's Norwegian immigrant community. Carl G. O. Hansen, in his detailed 1956 history of the Norwegians in Minneapolis, writes that "It would be safe to say that no single individual created such a stir among the city's Norwegians as did Kristofer Janson [during] the twelve years he spent here. . . ." (Hansen, My Minneapolis, p. 99.) Janson was a regular contributor to leading Norwegian language newspapers. He was a spell-binding lecturer and spoke frequently on Norwegian folklore, culture, and religious topics throughout the Midwest and on the East and West coasts. His carefully prepared weekly sermons were reprinted in local newspapers and often circulated in pamphlet form. Janson held weekly discussion groups and a popular Sunday evening literary reading at his Minneapolis church. Both events attracted crowds who came to hear Janson discuss socialism, labor reform, populism, religious tolerance, and the status of women, or to hear him read from his newest novels and poems or those by Ibsen, Bjornson, and other Scandinavian writers. Janson inspired the establishment of the liberal young people's political and literary group "Fram" in 1882, and in 1887 was one of seven organizers of a Norwegian Art Society. During the 1880's and 1890's, the Janson home collected a well known and unusual group of Norwegian musicians, artists, writers, and political activists including Knut Hamsum, Janson's assistant who later became a Nobel prize winning writer, and Amandus E. Norman, Janson's student who was to become the second minister of Nora Church.

Janson's association with immigrants in Brown County began within a month of his arrival in Minneapolis in 1881. He received a letter from Johannes Mo, leader of a group of Norwegian Lutherans who were dissatisfied with petty dissension within their local Synod church (one issue centering around who could be buried in the church cemetery) and had recently formed their own congregation. Members of the group had read Janson's work and heard him lecture, and were calling him to serve as their pastor. On January 10, 1882, Janson agreed to become their minister, described to them his Unitarian beliefs, and organized the Nora Free Christian Church with forty voting members and twenty-five children.

During the following months members of the Nora Church were criticized, shunned, and slandered as free thinking heretics by their conservative Lutheran neighbors. In discussing (and attempting to downplay) the cemetery issue, Johannes Mo wrote in one Norwegian newspaper that the Nora group intended to have a burial ground at their church in which anyone, regardless of creed, might bury their dead, including Synod ministers who denied this privilege to others. (Draxton, Kristofer Janson in America, p. 72.).

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Despite criticism, the group purchased land for a church and cemetery in Linden Township by the fall of 1882, receiving substantial financial help from Unitarians on the East Coast. During the spring of 1883 a church building with living quarters for the Janson family was constructed, with the first regular services held there July 8 and 15, 1883. Six days later, on July 21, the building was leveled by a tornado, inciting Janson's outspoken critics to claim that this act of nature was an act of God.

Church services continued at Nora as reconstruction of the church began, this time with a separate parsonage for the Jansons. The present church was dedicated by Janson on July 13, 1884, at a celebration attended by 400 people. Summer services at the church were major weekly events at which Janson would deliver an inspiring sermon, followed each week by a picnic on the lawn, a local band concert and social hour, and an afternoon literary reading and discussion by Janson, followed by final prayers and hymns.

The Jansons regarded Nora Church as a relaxing and refreshing refuge from the city, referring to it as their "paradise in Madelia" and as their favorite place in Minnesota (Draxton, p. 102, 229.) Unlike the Minneapolis congregation which needed constant energy to remain alive, the group at Nora was a strong, independent group which guided itself for much of the year and was not as draining for Janson to serve. Although they maintained their winter home in Minneapolis, the Jansons and their seven children spent each summer between 1883 and 1892 at Nora Church, living the first summer in a cottage in nearby Madelia and then at the church grounds. These summers were prolific for Janson, who took a break from the city's activities and lectures to do much of his studying and writing. During this period he published novels, stories, poems, articles, and pamphlets, and prepared issues of his own monthly journal "Saamanden" (The Sower) which he published beginning in September 1887.

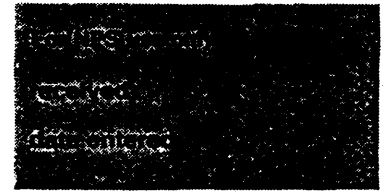
Janson served the Nora congregation until September of 1893 when he returned to Norway after spending one last summer at Nora Church. He continued to write, speak, and minister in Norway, and did not return to the United States, although he continued to correspond with members of Nora congregation until his death in Copenhagen in 1917.

Succeeding Janson in much of his work was his protege, Dr. Amandus E. Norman. Norman was a Norwegian who had immigrated to Reynolds, North Dakota. He met Janson in 1885 and lived with the Jansons from 1886-1887, accompanying them to Nora Church for the summer of 1887. Norman then attended Meadville Theological Seminary, graduating in June of 1892, and studied for a year at Harvard Divinity School. In the spring of 1893 he was asked by Janson to take over Janson's parishes in Brown County, Minneapolis, and Hudson. Norman was ordained by Janson and three other ministers in Minneapolis on Sunday, Sept. 3, 1893, the day Janson delivered his farewell address to Minnesotans.

Norman served as pastor of the three churches from 1893-1896 and 1898-1906 when the Minneapolis church folded (the Hudson church also folded about this time). The Nora group then asked him to become their full time minister and, in preparation, erected the present parsonage in 1906 on the site of the smaller cottage which had housed the Janson and, later, Norman families.

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Amandus Norman, although not as charismatic or outspoken as Janson, became a well known and widely respected Unitarian minister. He was active in the affairs of the nearby village of Hanska, offering the library at Nora Church for public use, leading the congregation's erection of the Liberal Union Hall in Hanska as a social and cultural center (built in 1910, on the National Register), and arranging for Hanska to be placed on the circuit for the University of Minnesota's series of extension concerts and lectures. From 1914-1931 he published a quarterly religious and cultural journal which circulated in the U. S., Canada, and Norway. In 1908, with a colleague, he organized the Minnesota Conference of Unitarian Young People which for fifteen successive years held a week long encampment at Nora Church. Each summer the conference's one hundred participants lived in tents on the church grounds and were addressed by leading speakers from across the country. In 1920 Norman was awarded the Doctor of Divinity by Meadville Theological Seminary. He died on November 14, 1931, a few months after the Nora congregation celebrated its fiftieth anniversary.

Nora Free Christian Church, which has survived Kristofer Janson's other two churches and most of his mission groups, remains the state's most prominent symbol of Janson's years in Minnesota and a vigorous memorial to the teachings of Janson and Amandus E. Norman. The church exists today as a healthy rural Unitarian congregation whose beliefs are still influenced by the foundations laid by Janson and Norman. The church falls within the State Historic Preservation Office's "Agricultural Development and Railroad Construction" historic context and represents an important historical component of the state's Norwegian immigrant culture.

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Nora Free Christian Church  
Linden Township (vicinity of Hanska) Minnesota

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The period of significance for the Nora Free Christian Church extends from 1883, which marks the construction of the present church and its association with its first pastor, Kristofer Janson, to 1931 which denotes the end of the church's association with Amandus Norman, the congregation's second pastor.

The Nora Free Christian Church is significant under criterion A for its historic association with the unique ethnic Norwegian branch of the liberal Unitarian Church and under criterion B for its historic association with founding pastor, Kristopher Janson, and successor pastor, Amandus Norman, who carried on the work of the church until his death.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

- Draxton, Nina. Kristofer Janson in America. Boston: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1976.
- Hansen, Carl G. O. My Minneapolis. Minneapolis: By the author, 1956.
- Holmquist, June D., ed. They Chose Minnesota. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Soc., 1981.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 4.1 acres

Quadrangle name Hanska Quad

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	5	3	8	1	5	4	0	4	8	8	8	6	3	5
Zone			Easting					Northing						

B 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

C 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

E 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

F 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

G 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

H 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

### Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property occupies all of Lot A and Lot B, located in Gov't Lot 7, Section 19, Township 108 North, Range 30 West, Linden Township. The boundary includes the entire lots which have historically been associated with the property.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Granger, Contract Historian

State Historic Preservation Office

organization Minnesota Historical Society

date March 1986

street & number Fort Snelling History Center

telephone (612) 726-1171

city or town St. Paul

state Minnesota 55111

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Nina M. Archabal

Nina M. Archabal

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 6/24/88

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 8/4/88

William Byer  
Keeper of the National Register

date

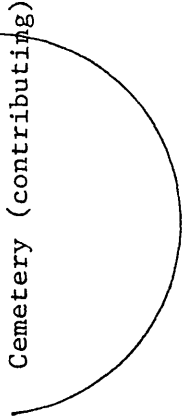
Attest:

Chief of Registration

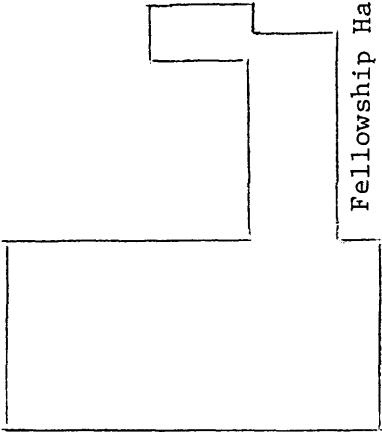


Nora Free Christian Church  
Linden Township, Brown County, MN  
Sketch Map  
(This is not a boundary map)

Co. Hwy. 257



Cemetery (contributing)

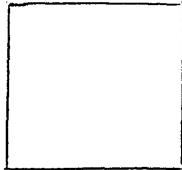


Church (contributing)

Fellowship Hall (non-contributing)



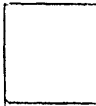
Gazebo (contributing)



Parsonage (contributing)



Log Building (non-contributing)



Garage (non-contributing)